

Minutes of: **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 16 September 2025

Present: Councillor C Boles (in the Chair)
Councillors D Berry, U Farooq, E FitzGerald, S Haroon,
J Lancaster, G Marsden and L Ryder

Also in attendance: Councillor L Smith, Cabinet member for Children and Young People
Jeanette Richards Executive Director Children and Young People
Wendy Young Head of Service • Department for Children & Young People
Robert Arrowsmith Head of Strategy, Assurance and Reform

Public Attendance: No members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor A Arif, Councillor S Arif and Councillor J Grimshaw

68 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

69 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

70 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 10th July 2025 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

71 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were received in advance of the meeting.

72 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

73 CHILDRENS SERVICES COMPLAINTS REPORT

This item was deferred to a future meeting

74 OFSTED STANDARD INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN BURY

Councillor L Smith Cabinet member for Children and Young people provided an overview of the recent Ofsted inspection, with thanks formally recorded to the committee and staff for their dedication and hard work. A special note of appreciation was extended to Jeanette Richards for her leadership throughout the journey.

The discussion opened with questions around consistency across teams. Concerns were raised about the variability in practice and the challenges posed by workforce stability, recruitment, and agency costs. Despite training efforts, the impact has been inconsistent, and there was recognition of the need for stronger support for team managers. It was noted that a training support framework has been developed for social workers, and while quality assurance has highlighted good practice, consistency remains a priority.

Jeanette Richards Executive Director for Children and Young People acknowledged the progress made but emphasised that more work is needed to ensure consistency between team managers and practitioners. She described efforts to establish a structured approach, including reflective supervision, which has been well received by the workforce. Supervision reporting is at good levels, and dip sampling has led to additional learning and development opportunities for team managers.

There was a collective expression of gratitude to the leadership team, with congratulations offered to all involved. The conversation then turned to future priorities. While many children are now receiving the services they need, there are still limitations. The question was raised about whether the focus should now be on managing the current system or identifying areas for further progress.

It was suggested that the submission of a new plan presents an opportunity to refocus efforts, particularly on early help and ensuring stability amidst broader social care changes. The importance of doing the basics well and aligning children's services with the education strategy was highlighted as key to improving outcomes.

Joanne Burns reflected positively on the improvements seen in early help and frontline collaboration but noted ongoing difficulties in recruiting staff with the right skills. She asked whether a model based on clusters or communities of care could be planned for the future. It was shared that early help pilots had received mixed feedback, and reforms are underway to strengthen partnerships, including bringing health partners into schools.

Jeanette added that nationally, there are concerns about developmental outcomes for children post-lockdown. Locally, a Best Start and Early Help Board has been established, and additional health visitors have been recruited. While family hubs are being publicised, more work is needed to develop the offer and ensure awareness.

Wendy Young Head of Service for SEND spoke about the development of communities of practice, linking with the educational psychology service and increasing school engagement. The aim is to improve integration and align with the ICB, offering a wraparound approach for schools. Statutory assessment and review teams have been extended to include attendance and virtual schools, with many schools also managing SEND needs. There was discussion about how to better engage with schools and primary care settings, and how to ensure schools know where to go for support in times of crisis.

Joanne Burns sought clarification on the communities of practice model, asking whether it would involve groups of schools or individual ones. Wendy explained that each cluster area has a designated team representing schools, with universal, targeted, and specialist support available. The approach will be tailored to local needs, ensuring no child is left behind.

Jeanette emphasised the importance of everyone being part of the ecosystem, noting the upcoming launch on 29th September. The system will be monitored and adapted as needed.

The conversation moved to the post-inspection action plan. It was confirmed that work has begun and is progressing well. Meetings are taking place to shape the plan and drive continued improvement in children's services. Jeanette suggested that the full improvement plan could be brought back to a future committee for scrutiny. It was agreed that the Ofsted improvement plan would be reviewed in January following its submission in November.

Reflecting on lessons learned since 2021, it was acknowledged that when the original plan didn't work, it was recalibrated and relaunched. Cross-party collaboration was recognised as a key strength, and the importance of listening to children and young people was highlighted. Jeanette shared that the journey has been a privilege and that the broader reflection is one of collective endeavour and commitment to improvement.

The item concluded with a summary of key themes: appreciation for the team's efforts, recognition of supervision challenges, interest in innovation including AI, and a renewed focus on early help. The committee agreed to revisit the improvement plan in a future meeting.

It Was agreed

- The update be noted
- Thanks to be extended to the Children and Young peoples department for their hard work and dedication
- To bring back the improvement plan to a future meeting

75 THE LOCAL AREA RESPONSE TO THE PUBLISHED SEND INSPECTION AND MONTHLY UPDATE

Wendy Young, Head of Service for SEND, provided an update on the SEND landscape in Bury. She reported that two stocktakes have taken place since the introduction of the Priority Impact Plan, both of which have provided assurance to the Department for Education (DfE). The July stocktake highlighted the positive involvement of children and young people in the improvement journey, noting that their voices are embedded within the Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board, even when they are not physically present. The focus is now shifting towards deepening the understanding of priorities and strengthening the development plan over the next six months in preparation for the next stocktake.

Questions were raised regarding the expansion of local SEND provision. Brookhaven School has previously opened, and the DfE has agreed to support the development of a new special school. The aim is to adopt a graduated approach and retain children within the borough. However, concerns were expressed about delays to the new school's opening, which was originally scheduled for 2026 but is now expected to be behind schedule.

Officers informed members it has identified a site and is supporting the planning process, although delays have stemmed from the DfE's consideration of alternative options, including whether existing schools could accommodate the provision.

Attention turned to the neurodiversity hubs, Members expressed interest in understanding how these hubs will support children and young people, particularly in preventing mental health issues linked to unmet neurodiverse needs. It was agreed that colleagues from Health will be

invited to a future meeting to present the neurodiversity plan, with emphasis on the need for joint working between health and children's services.

Concerns were raised about children whose needs are not being met due to schools being unable to identify or accommodate them. The expansion of Milwood School was discussed as part of the inclusion strategy. Although the expansion is underway, it has faced delays. The process involves panel commissioning and determining whether provision is available.

Wendy Young clarified that unsuitability alone does not constitute legal grounds for appeal unless incompatibility is proven. The local authority must ensure that consultations are thorough and that provision is secured appropriately. The importance of mainstream settings making a difference was reiterated, with a focus on ensuring children access the right provision at the right time.

Joanne Burns raised the issue of children recognised as needing specialist provision but being placed out of borough due to a lack of local options. Wendy responded that meeting the needs outlined in EHCPs is a priority, and tribunals only arise when those needs cannot be met. She acknowledged that Bury has faced challenges in this area and that efforts are being made to improve resource provision and reduce delays.

Councillor Smith reflected on the SEND improvement journey, noting that tribunal delays are often linked to case law and the need for robust planning. The committee discussed the importance of securing a completion date for the Milwood expansion and whether funding had been allocated.

Looking ahead, members considered the challenges in achieving the desired impact. Resource constraints, particularly around high needs funding, and siloed decision-making were identified as barriers. However, there was optimism that the changing landscape and stronger partnership working, including through the SENCO network, could support progress.

Wendy Young emphasised the need to rebuild trust with parents and carers, acknowledging that systemic failures cannot be resolved overnight. Robert Arrowsmith added that parental confidence in accessing support without an EHCP remains low, and Bury has a higher proportion of EHCPs in mainstream schools compared to national averages. This reflects a broader national challenge.

It was agreed that

- The update be noted
- An update around the neurodiversity hubs be requested from Health colleagues at a future meeting

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URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR C BOLES
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.30 pm)